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E.O. 12958: DECL: X1 MANUAL REVIEW  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [EINV](#) [ECON](#) [CH](#)  
SUBJECT: WITH "SURVEY OF CHINESE PEASANTS" AUTHORS

CLASSIFIED BY: Mary Tarnowka, Section Chief, Political/Economic  
Section , U.S. Consulate Shanghai.  
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. In a conversation with Poloff on April 20, "Survey of Chinese Peasants" (Zhongguo Nongmin Diaocha) authors said conditions in the countryside had improved in recent years as a result of increased central government attention. However, conditions for peasants were still difficult because many local officials were corrupt and neglected problems in the countryside. The couple was researching a follow-up book that they planned to publish in 2008. While they were free to move around the country, they feared returning to their home in Fuyang City, Anhui province because of harassment from local officials. A Fuyang city official had sued the couple for libel in 2004. The court had not made a decision on the case yet, but, according to Chen, their publisher was forced to settle the case after receiving pressure by Politburo Standing Committee Member Luo Gan. End Summary.

¶2. (C) On April 20, Poloff met with the authors of "Survey of Chinese Peasants" (Zhongguo Nongmin Diaocha), Chen Guidi and Wu Chuntao. Chen and Wu, who were married in 1991, in 2004, published "Survey of Chinese Peasants", which provided extensive details about the hardship and corruption faced by peasants in the countryside. The book was a sensation and sold 150,000 copies in one month. The government eventually became uncomfortable with the findings in the book and banned it in March 2004. Wu noted that while the book was only technically banned for one month, book sellers refused to touch the book and the book, thereafter, was only available overseas.

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Conditions Improved, But Serious Problems Exist  
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¶3. (C) Wu and Chen said that they were currently working on a follow-up to "Survey of Chinese Peasants" and had spent the last year traveling around China and meeting with peasants in villages as far away as Gansu Province. They planned to publish their new book in 2008. According to their research, peasants appeared to be more satisfied with their living conditions than

in 2004. They attributed this to the central government's increased attention to the rural poor and its emphasis on building a "harmonious society". Peasants no longer had to pay taxes which amounted to 300 RMB per year and, in some cases, were receiving subsidies from the government.

14. (C) Despite these improvements, conditions in the countryside were still difficult. Most of the villages that they visited were largely empty and only the very old or very young remained. There was no one to take care of these people and help them when problems surfaced. Wu said, for example, rural children were doing poorly in school because there was no parental supervision. She said it was ironic since many parents moved to the city to find work to pay for a good education for their children. She added that they had received reports from migrant laborers that they were also dissatisfied. Many lived in difficult conditions and received low pay. While there were some cases of laborers returning to their villages, most had no other option but to remain in the city where they could make money. Wu added that most peasants were resigned to their conditions and too busy to protest. She noted that, for many peasants, their lives had always been difficult and current living conditions were no worse than in the past.

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Corruption Continues  
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15. (C) Wu and Chen were very critical of local officials. Wu said local officials largely neglected the peasants and did nothing to improve conditions in the countryside. According to Wu, most officials played mahjong all day long and only came into contact with peasants to extort money from them. Chen said peasants often had to bribe officials to obtain documents such

SHANGHAI 00000260 002 OF 002

as identification or birth certificates. Chen and Wu were more positive about central government officials. They said that central government authorities appeared to be genuinely concerned about the peasants, as evidenced by the reduction of taxes. However, central government authorities did not understand the peasants. In addition, the peasants did not have a "voice". There was no independent farmers union or newspaper that represented the peasants. Chen and Wu said that this was the reason why they have continued their research. They would like to educate the government and urban people on this issue and give the peasants their "voice".

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Local Government Harassment  
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16. (C) Wu and Chen said that they enjoyed relative freedom. The government did not restrict their movements inside China and they were free to travel abroad. (Note: Poloff met the researchers when they were in Shanghai applying for a visa. They planned to attend a literary conference at Columbia University. End Note.) However, the local government where they were from in Fuyang City, Anhui Province had caused them a lot of problems. Wu said that they had not returned to their home in one year because they were afraid of the local government. Wu and Chen, who had been married since 1991, had moved their son out of Fuyang for his safety.

17. (C) "Survey of Chinese Peasants" contained many stories about corrupt officials in Fuyang, in particular Zhang Xide, who was the Party Secretary of Linquan county, Fuyang City when the book was published. Zhang sued the couple for libel in 2004 and claimed that many of the stories in the book were fabricated. According to Chen, the local court had yet to issue a decision on the case. He said, however, that their publisher was pressured by the Politburo Bureau Standing Committee Member Luo Gan to agree to a settlement. Chen said he was never consulted by the publisher and would have never given his permission for a settlement. Chen and Wu had spent over 50,000 RMB on the case, paying living expenses for their lawyer and witnesses. They

believed that it was important for the court to issue a decision that would confirm the validity of their book. (Comment: Fuyang is known for its corruption. Its district government office, which resembles the White House and cost more than RMB 30 million (USD 3.9 million), was singled out by the central government in the recent ruling banning construction of "wasteful and extravagant official buildings". End Comment.)

18. (C) Chen said that since the trial the Fuyang government has harassed them and their family members. A few years ago, the local government sent people to stone their house. Chen said that it was impossible for them to work and live in Anhui. They were currently trying to find a new place to live in China.

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Future Plans  
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19. (C) Wu and Chen were very proud of Zhongguo Nongmin Diaocha because the book had led to some reforms and improvements for the peasants. As they did on their last book, they planned on using their own money to publish the second book in China. Although their last book was banned in China, it sold very well in the West and won many prizes. They were using this money to support their research. Wu was worried that the government would not be pleased with the next book and that the couple would face harassment and further government pressure after the book was published. She added that she was not sure if they could even publish the book in China. Regardless, they believed it was important to try to publish their book in China where it would have more influence.  
JARRETT